Brighton before it was Brighton

April 5, 2014 will mark 200 years since the Town of Brighton was formed at the Stone Tolan house and Oliver Culver became Brighton's first supervisor. In anticipation of the bicentennial in 2014, the remaining two issues of Historic Brighton News in 2013 will concentrate on the early history of the land that became Brighton in 1814. In this issue we feature Native Americans who lived here for many more centuries than transplanted Europeans have.

The Seneca lived on hilltops in longhouses inside palisaded fences

An enduring remnant of the glacier is "Sugar-Loaf" on the south side of Atlantic Avenue. Legend has it that Captain Kidd buried treasure here. EB

Mohawk Joseph Brant (Thayendengoe) fought with British in French and Indian War, GCM

Chief Freeman Johnson, descendant of the Seneca, at the Indian Landing in today's Ellison Park, 1912 RR

Senecas camped at the oxbow on Irondequoit Creek, RHSPS

Modern postcard of the Landing, once the seaport of the Seneca Nation RR

1912 plaque at Indian Landing, RR

Revisiting turf in 1912, RR

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The first human inhabitants of the Irondequoit Valley were the Archaic Algonkins. From their crude tools of stone and bone left along the shores of the bay, researchers surmise that small wandering groups came and went in search of food. Eskimos wandered through to hunt and fish, leaving their typical knives of rubbed slate.

The Intermediate Algonkins polished their stones and bones, including antlers. They used acorns and nuts and pulverized seeds for food. They dried meat, fish and mussels in huge quantities—apparently for barter. During their later stages they made crude pottery and soapstone dishes. They still used javelins and spears, but their arrows were more plentiful. They often lived in large encampments.

Thousands of years later, the third Algonkin people made excellent decorated pottery. They cultivated corn, beans, squash, tobacco, and sunflowers and collected the wild plants of the forest. They were peaceful, but strong enough to clear the area of human enemies. Then came the invasion of the mound people—exceedingly tall and long limbed—who used measurement and were able to shape objects symmetrically. They quarried flinty rocks that they turned into large and beautiful chipped blades and were expert in the use of native copper, producing ornaments and weapons by a beating process. They did not melt and cast it but cut and engraved the sheet metal. They were skilled workers in shell too—indicating contact with the coast.

Traditionally, it was believed that Algonkins migrated west to east, having crossed land bridges across the Bering Strait. Several scholars now think that some early people came from Europe.

According to modern web sites, both Algonkin and Algonquin are correct spellings for the name of the tribe, but Algonquian either refers to their language or, collectively, to the group of tribes that speak related Algonquian languages. The source of Algonkin is unclear, other than the names of their bands; the Algonkin do not appear to have had a name for themselves as people.
Either way, there was a leisurely shifting of village sites as they became uninhabitable due to the accumulation of refuse, lack of firewood, and scarcity of game. Lakes Erie and Ontario separated the migrating tribes; one part went to today's Canada, one to today's New York State. Where the two branches united at the St. Lawrence River, at first there was peace—the northern tribe being hunters, the southern cultivators—but then both tribes went into the forest to hunt. Since 7,000 acres of forest hunting ground was needed to support one tribe, difficulties began and raids were common. According to legend, one cold night, the hungry and envious northern tribe sneaked into the successful southern tribe's camp and murdered them as they slept. Fearing a further massacre, the surviving southern tribe crossed the Appalachian Mountains into the Mohawk Valley. The hatred between northern (later, Huron) nations and southern (later, Seneca) nations would survive.

About 1300 CE, during the period of the greatest development of the early settlers, the Iroquois fought their way up the Allegheny and Ohio rivers and along the south shore of Lake Erie and swooped into the GEN-IS-HE-YO—their word for "pleasant valley." Iroquois vanguard built hilltop fortifications from which to explore and eventually conquer and destroy. The Algonkin people who were not exterminated or absorbed probably fled to New England or down the Susquehanna, Delaware, Ohio and Allegheny rivers or crossed the Niagara or Detroit rivers to find refuge. The all-conquering power of the Iroquois spread terror to the less organized Algonkin. The Iroquois (from an Algonkian word for "real adder") knit its society through families, clans, and nations. The Seneca people, who had a village at the Ox Bow of Irondequoit Creek in today's Ellison Park, acted as a unit.

A self-sufficient community, the Seneca had traditions, a stable economy and leadership, decorated pottery, copper weapons and shell ornaments. A tribal meeting place of many trails under a giant elm in today's Brighton is still marked by a council rock.

In 1570 the Seneca nation joined with four neighboring Iroquois nations in a chain of friendship. Each nation had special duties and privileges. The Mohawk guarded the Eastern Door on the Mohawk River (near Schenectady). They received ambassadors, collected tribute, reported invasions, and were to hold the Mahican people of the Hudson Valley in check. The Oneida were regarded as younger brothers who watched over captives and received small groups for adoption. The central Onondaga in the hill country south of the lake of the same name were to "preserve the Council Fire," mediate the League Assembly that met every two years, and keep the confederate records. The Cayuga, along their lake, were called "pipe bearers" and also considered "younger brothers."

The Seneca held the largest region—west to the Genesee—and faced the largest number of enemies. Its duty was to guard the Western Door, collect tribute, and receive ambassadors.

The Seneca wanted the Huron to join too. The Huron lived in what is now Canada and did not trust the Seneca. The two nations were constantly at war.

The Six Nations of the Iroquois controlled the Mohawk Trail from Albany to Buffalo, the top of the escarpment now called Ridge Road from Oswego to Niagara Falls. They also controlled the portage route from the Indian Landing on Irondequoit Creek in today's Ellison Park just south of the Pinnacle Hills (now Highland Ave.) to the juncture of Red Creek and the Genesee River in Genesee Valley Park. Portaged canoes could be launched to complete the water route from the St. Lawrence River and Lake Ontario to the Ohio Valley and the entire Susquehanna and Mississippi basins to Chesapeake Bay and the Gulf of Mexico.

The Seneca lived in villages with a distinctly different lifestyle from their wandering, hunter-gatherer predecessors. A Seneca village was a stockaded settlement, usually on a hilltop for security. Many families lived together in longhouses covered with bark. Each family had its own fire and place to sleep.
The Seneca men were hunters. The Seneca women cleared land around their scattered villages to plant corn, squash, pumpkin, and tobacco. They picked peaches and apples from their orchards and wild berries and herbs.

There are sites of Archaic Algonkin occupation along Irondequoit Bay. Another site is the present location of the University of Rochester on Oak Hill along the Genesee River. Among Brighton locations, the Seneca had a village at the oxbow of Irondequoit Creek and another village where the Houston Barnard tract was built in the 1920s.

This article is based on writings of Arthur Parker, Native American and director of the Rochester Museum of Arts and Sciences. The writings were published in the Rochester Historical Society Publication Series.

Moccasined feet initially laid out Brighton's roads. Landing Road and Highland Avenue, the portage route from the Indian Landing to the Genesee River, was once a 12-inch-wide path through dark pine forests marked by blazed trees and worn by Iroquois traveling silently single file. Clover Street was once the trail of the portage route to the Seneca village of Toliakton; the alleged Council Rock stands at this junction.

Lewis Henry Morgan, 1818-1881, conducted breakthrough research on the Iroquois and earned the sobriquet "father of American anthropology."

Born in Aurora, Morgan began a law practice in Rochester in 1840. An early interest in the Iroquois led to the 1851 publication of a study that attracted international attention. Another interest was female education and he left his residual estate for that purpose. Morgan was the undisputed intellectual leader of the Rochester community from the 1850s until his death.

Behind his home he built a large library modeled on that of Sir Walter Scott at Abbotsford. The library became the scene of lively discussions and debates.

Sources for this newsletter:
- EB Photo by Elizabeth Brayer
- GCV Genesee Country Village: Scenes of Town and Country in the Nineteenth Century by Stuart Bolger, 1985
- PTT Preface to Tomorrow: Monroe County History Briefly Told and Illustrated, 1971
- RHSPS Rochester Historical Society Publication Series, 1922-
- RR Photo courtesy of Ron Richardson
- TIB Tryon in Brighton by Margaret MacNab, 1975
15,000,000 B.C.E.: Mastodons roamed in Brighton.

8,000 B.C.E.: Mastodons disappeared.

Ancient Algonkins were descendants of Asians who crossed a land bridge across Bering Strait. Some may have come from Europe. They were supplanted by the Mound People.

1300: Senecas moved into the Gen-is-he-o or pleasant valley.

1535: Jacques Cartier of St. Malo, a walled port city in Brittany, sailed up the St. Lawrence, altering forever the history of the Genesee and Irondequoit valleys.

1570: Five Nations formed the League of the Iroquois. A sixth was added later.

1603: Navigator Samuel de Champlain came to Canada. He will earn the title Father of New France.

1609: Champlain fired on Mohawk chiefs near present Ticonderoga, arousing Iroquois hatred that persisted for 150 years.

1612: Champlain published the first maps showing the Great Lakes and Genesee River.

1610-1615: Etienne Brule became the first European to cross the Genesee Country. He was on a war mission for Champlain.

1663: All that is now western and central New York and eastern Canada was visited by a tremendous earthquake.

1669: Robert Cavelier, Sieur de la Salle, visited Irondequoit Bay, disembarking at the Indian Landing.

1678: With materials for shipbuilding and a stock of provisions, La Salle crossed Lake Ontario and entered Irondequoit Bay again.

1679: A small bark cabin, in which to perform divine services was built near the Indian Landing by missionaries including Father Hennepin, European discoverer of Niagara Falls.
1687: The Marquis de Denonville, Governor General of Canada, led a punitive expedition into Iroquois territory, destroying four Indian towns.

1688: Montreal was destroyed by a Seneca war party in retaliation for the Denonville raid.

1716: Fort de Sables, a small trading station, was erected by the French at Sea Breeze on Irondequoit Bay.

1721: Governor Burnett of the Province of New York directed the building of a fort/trading station on Irondequoit Creek at the Indian Landing. It was occupied for a year by a small Dutch group of volunteers headed by Captain Peter Schuyler Jr. and abandoned in 1722.

1740: The lower Genesee Country was sold to the king of England by the Iroquois.

1759: British and Indian troops under General Prideaux camped at Irondequoit Bay on their way to besiege Fort Niagara where Prideaux was killed.

1763: French and Indian War was over.

1768: Views of the Upper and Lower Falls of the Genesee were published in London under the name of Canaconhiagon or Little Seneca River.

1776: American Revolution began.

1779: The Sullivan-Clinton Campaign against the Iroquois broke the united war strength of the League of the Iroquois. It extended knowledge of the fertility of the Genesee Country which led to its rapid settlement after the Revolution.

1786: The states of Massachusetts and New York settled their conflicting claims to western New York lands.

1787: Land companies obtained leases running for 999 years from the Six Nations on all Iroquois lands in New York State.

1788: Oliver Phelps and Nathaniel Gorham obtained land between Seneca Lake and the Genesee River.
1789: John Lusk arrived from Schenectady, cleared land at the Indian Landing, and built a log cabin. Settlement commenced at Pittsford. Phelps and Gorham gave Ebemezer (Indian) Allan 100 acres to erect saw and grist mills on west side of Genesee River.

1790: Orringh Stone settled on Pittsford Road (now East Avenue) in a cabin opposite the Council Rock.

1794: Town of Northfield organized from Ontario County, comprising what was later Brighton, Pittsford, Penfield, Perinton, Henrietta, Irondequoit, and Webster.

1796: Oliver Culver visited Irondequoit Bay, finding one family, the Dunbars, living there.

1797: Tryon settled. Louis Philippe of France, his brother, the Duke de Montpensier, and Count Beaujolais visited the Stone Tavern and the Genesee Falls.

1798: Name of Northfield changed to Boyle and later Smallwood. Judge John Tryon became the owner of the site of the settlement called Tryon on Irondequoit Creek opposite the Indian Landing.

1799: Tryon settlement became busy trading point. Store opened under the name of Tryon and Adams.

1800: Road built from Tryon to connect with road leading from Orringh Stone's Tavern to the Genesee River. Oliver Culver employed by Augustus Griswold to manage the ashery at the Indian Landing, the first established in this region. Oliver Culver bought land at today's East Avenue and Culver Road but did not settle there until 1803. Road surveyed from Rattlesnake Spring to the Genesee River.

1803: Col. Nathaniel Rochester, Col. William Fitzhugh, and Major Charles Carroll purchased the One-Hundred-Acre Tract. The only post office in all Genesee Country was at Canandaigua.

1804: Merchants of Canandaigua built Merchants' Road from Canandaigua to Tryon and Charlotte in the interest of shipping. Mail was carried over this route. Oliver Culver purchased goods from Tryon merchants for trade at Cleveland on Lake Erie.
1805: Orringh Stone, George Dailey, Samuel Spafford, and Miles Northrup cut a four mile road (East Avenue and Court Street) two rods wide from Orringh Stone's to the river with the help of $50 from the Town of Northfield. First Genesee River flood on record.

1806: Solomon Fuller built a small mill on Irondequoit Creek in Brighton and outfitted it with Indian Allan's millstones. Timothy Allyn sold his 500 acres on Allyn's Creek to John and Solomon Hatch; in company with them Oliver Culver built a sawmill on Allyn's Creek.

1809: State legislature passed act for construction of a bridge at the Genesee Falls.

1810: State begins construction of said wooden bridge over Genesee at what is now Main Street. Bounty on rattlesnakes increased. DeWitt Clinton made his first visit to the area.

1811: Oliver Culver built schooner Clarissa on the Roswell farm in Brighton and launched it at Irondequoit Bay. Lot sales began on One-Hundred-Acre-Tract.

1812: First dwelling erected on One-Hundred-Acre-Tract was log hut for Hamlet Scramont. Dr. Levi Ward obtained authority to transport mail from Canandaigua to Charlotte.

1813: Threatened invasion by British under Commodore Yeo was abandoned. Brightonians who fought in War of 1812 included Gideon Cobb.

1814: Town of Brighton was organized comprising present Rochester east of the river to Irondequoit Bay, and from Lake Ontario to the township of Henrietta. This new town, named for the British seaside resort, came into being at the first town meeting held at Orringh Stone's Tavern on 5 April 1814. Irondequoit would separate from Brighton in 1839.

The content of some of this newsletter is adapted from the forthcoming book Boomtown Echoes by Elizabeth Brayer.
Like many areas of western New York, Brighton was colonized by European settlers at a relatively late date (1810s-1820s). Unlike comparable areas of the upper Midwest, Brighton underwent no systematic clear-cutting nor the resulting catastrophic fires. Through its early years, Brighton lands were primarily used for small to mid-sized family farms and brickyards. Areas poorly suited for agriculture (slopes and ridges associated with kames, eskers, drumlins, kettle holes, etc.) were subject to small-scale timber harvest by farmers but not converted to crop production.

Land that the glacier made unsuitable for farming was sold for other uses such as cemeteries or was never cleared and thus fell by benign neglect into old growth forest. There are about 50 such forests in Monroe County, some of which are in Brighton. According to the research of Leo Dodd, a 25-acre woods in West Brighton that was “protected for 120 years (1824-1964) by the Edmunds family” had even earlier been “a plant community once protected by the Iroquois of Western New York.” Even though there is new growth in these primeval forests, they are virtually unchanged since the days of the Algonkin and Seneca. Aerial photographs from the 1930s show fully mature parcels that have never been disturbed.

When the village of Rochesterville was chartered in 1817, it was located entirely in the Town of Gates, west of the Genesee. East of the river was Brighton, chartered in 1814. As the tiny cemetery on Buffalo Street (now West Main Street) filled, land for burials was sought. The highlands were not suitable for farming, so Brighton offered the western portion of its Pinnacle Hills. Actually, there were five cemeteries along the Pinnacle Range. In 1838 Mount Hope Cemetery opened with the latest architectural novelty—an Egyptian Revival gate. In 1840 the wild and beautiful land set aside for Mount Hope was annexed by the city, thus saying goodbye to Brighton.

Sources
Research by Leo Dodd for 1 June 2013 talk: “Brighton’s Oldest Living Resident”
www.ramseylab.org/Ramsey/Rochester_Forests.html
www.democratandchronicle.com/living/Millington-Old-growth-forest-right-in-middle-of-Rochester
http://www.ramseylab.org/Ramsey/Rochester_Forests.html
Mention Brighton’s iconic Council Rock and explanations always begin, “According to legend…” because there are no photographs or written accounts of Iroquois elders meeting here. But the rock is undeniably at the junction of known Iroquois trails and when Orringh Stone, son of Enos Stone, one of the original purchasers of Township 13 Range 7 from Phelps and Gorham, considered a site for his tavern about 1790, he picked this spot. The Stone tavern was located on the portage trail from the Landing to the Genesee, near the Seneca Council Rock. After Oliver Culver, Orringh Stone and others had cut what would become East Avenue, the tavern’s choice location on the Canandaigua-Genesee Falls route made it a stopping point for many travelers. The Council Rock legend continued to flourish for years under its magnificent elm. Other dates stand out in the saga of Rock and Tree.

In 1904 a widening of East Ave. raised the threat of removing the boulder by dynamite; A. Emerson Babcock, longtime supervisor of Brighton, led a movement to preserve it. In 1905 the Seneca Indian Council Rock Commission of Brighton, New York Law was signed by Governor Higgins. Commission members were Edwin C. Smith, A. Emerson Babcock, John T. Caley, Maria Hagaman, and T. Franklin Crittenden, well-known Brighton names all.

On October 9, 1919, 200 people tramped to the Council Rock site as it was dedicated “To the memory of the Nun-da-wa-o-no, the great Senecas of the Western Door” by the Seneca Indian Council Rock Commission of Brighton and the Rochester Historical Society.

In 1931, Council Rock had to give way to progress when East Avenue was widened again, according to Brighton Town Historian Dorothy Cumpston. The rock was moved from the southeast corner of Council Rock and East Avenues to the southwest corner, about twenty feet. The land to which it was moved was owned by Raye-Namrof Inc. which purchased it from Mary C. Finucane in 1930. Raye-Namrof gave permission to the Seneca Indian Council Rock Commission to place this rock on his property 17 June 1931. (Raye-Namrof stood for the merchant B. Forman. Namrof is Forman spelled backwards.)

By 1952, Mrs. Cumpston could write, “The tree had long since perished.” [The photo from the Rochester Historical Society series was obviously taken sometime before the elm perished.]

In 1974 the rock was moved to Stone-Tolan property. It weighed fifty tons, was seven feet tall and nine feet wide. The forty-ton crane originally selected to move the rock was too small and the cable snapped. An eighty-ton crane was successful in December 1974. Commission members in 1974 were Thomas C. Taylor, Mrs. Francis (“May”) Remington, Henry Kingston, and Mrs. C. Burnett Howard, daughter of Edwin C. Smith. In 1992 a disease-resistant elm was planted.

Arch Merrill, historian and newspaper writer who is buried in the Brighton Cemetery, once called the Council Rock “a vine-covered boulder squatting in massive dignity beside a sidewalk in Brighton. … Legend and tradition cling to it as well as greenery. … Each year the green vines thicken around its base. The tablet is still visible but few stop to read the inscription on it. And thousands daily whizz by the Council Rock without knowing it is there.”

Source: Town of Brighton Historian files
This was their land
Was it also the beginning of our Constitution?
It would be strange if ignorant savages could execute a union that persisted for ages and appears indissoluble; yet union is impractical for twelve colonies to whom it is more necessary and advantageous.

Benjamin Franklin

This was their land. In terms of the civilization of the red man, ancient Brighton is historic ground. As part of the six nations, it was home to what was in many ways the most advanced group of peoples in North America. They are still celebrated for a federal system under which large numbers of people, spread over hundreds of square miles, worked effectively for a common purpose.

Some historians, anthropologists and traditional Indian chiefs now say that the distinctive character of debate and compromise of American democracy has more to do with its native origins than with classical Europe. These people believe that the U.S. Constitution was based not on Ancient Greece and evolved as the result of European political theories but on the Iroquois Great Law of Peace. The Confederacy arose among separate warring communities as a way to create harmony, unity, and respect. The central idea is that peace is the will of the creator.

Gaynashagowa or the Great Law of Peace is the oral law written only on wampum belts, conceived by Deganwidah (the great peacemaker) and his spokesman Hiawatha. The original five member nations ratified this constitution near present-day Victor, with the sixth nation (the Tuscarora) added about 1720.

Historians once agreed that the Iroquois Confederacy started about 1570 but more recent estimates date it and its constitution to between 1090 and 1150 CE based on astronomical dating related to a total solar eclipse.

When the United States Constitution celebrated its bicentennial in 1987, one perspective was missing from the pageantry. That was that the origins of the constitution might be in the Iroquois Great Law of Peace rather than, as is usually assumed, the example of Ancient Greek democracy. (Western New York in the nineteenth century was dotted with communities named for ancient Greek or Roman communities such as Greece, Rome, Syracuse, Troy or Ithaca. Sympathy for Greece, then under the heel of Turkey, was widespread.) Two hundred scholars met at Cornell that year to discuss this. The late Brighton congressman Barber Conable (1922-2003, in office 1965-1985) was a life-long student of the Native Americans.

When Europeans first arrived in the North American northeast, the powerful Iroquois League controlled a vast sweep of land from the St. Lawrence south into Pennsylvania and west to Illinois. It controlled both the St. Lawrence and Mohawk-Hudson valleys and access to the Great Lakes. The Iroquois Confederacy's legislative branch was in two parts: Mohawk and Seneca were the elder brothers who formed the upper house. Oneida and Cayuga were younger brothers. The Iroquois equivalent of the Supreme Court was the Women's Council which settled disputes and judged legal violations.

It makes one wonder what might have developed on the North American continent if the Europeans hadn't begun interfering in the 16th century.

Sources
"World Roots of American Democracy" by David Yarrow, September 1987
http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/iroquois.asp
Brighton before it was Brighton

“A pretty river winds between two fine meadows, bordered with little hills between which we discovered valleys which extend a great way. The whole forms the finest prospect in the world bounded by a great forest of high trees.”

Rudyard Kipling, whose wife came from Monroe County, admitted in his autobiography that he “never got over the wonder of a race of people who, having extirpated aboriginals of their continent more completely than any modern race has done, believed that they were a godly New England community setting example to brutal mankind. This wonder I used to explain to Theodore Roosevelt who made the glass cases of Indian relics shake with his rebuttals.”

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